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BOOK
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WASHINGTON

President Reagan praised William Casey, his embattled CIA director, today in an appearance with Casey a day after a House subcommittee report implicated the spy chief in the pirating of President Carter's briefing papers during the 1980 presidential campaign.

Casey fended off reporters' questions but said he would have a statement later in the day.

During an outdoor ceremony at the CIA's headquarters in nearby Langley, Va., Reagan had good words for Casey along with the agency's other officials and agents but did not mention the debate papers controversy.

"Your work and the work of your director and other officials has been an inspiration to your fellow Americans and to people everywhere," Reagan said.

The ceremony was to mark the beginning of new construction to house a vast array of new computers for intelligence gathering. Reagan told his audience of CIA employees, "You are the trip wire over which the totalitarian rulers must stumble in their quest for world domination."

Earlier, while awaiting the arrival of Reagan, Casey declined to comment on the congressional report that said the "better evidence" shows White House chief of staff James Baker had received documents from President Carter's camp from Casey.

Casey said he expected to make a statement later in the day, brushing off further questions from reporters with a "not now." The CIA chief has said he would not have touched such material "with a 10-foot pole" and recalls nothing about the disputed documents or how they came to the inner circle of Reagan's 1980 election effort, which he headed.

A spokesman said Casey had not yet read the voluminous report delivered Wednesday by a House subcommittee led by Rep. Donald Albosta, D-Mich., after a 10-month inquiry.

Spokesman Chuck Wilson said Reagan's visit to the sprawling spy agency headquarters in suburban Virginia was "a great show of support for the CIA." Asked if it was a show of support for Casey, Wilson said, "He's a big part of the CIA."

When deputy White House press secretary Larry Speakes was asked Wednesday if there was any feeling in the White House that Casey should step down, he replied, "Not on the part of the president."

EXCERPTED